

BOOK REVIEWS

Joel Schor*Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice in Black
Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*

Greenwood Press, Inc., 250 pp., \$15.95

Ninety-five years ago in Liberia, Africa, Henry Highland Garnet died. Besides being an ardent abolitionist, Garnet was also a Presbyterian minister, newspaper editor, orator, author, and political organizer. Historian George Washington Williams personally observed that Garnet's oratory was "equal in ability to Frederick Douglass, especially in logic and terse statement." Carter G. Woodson stated that "Garnet created the ideas which Frederick Douglass tempered and presented to the world in a more palliative and acceptable form." Despite Garnet's accomplishments, almost a century has passed in which Garnet's biography remained unwritten. Happily, Joel Schor has filled that void with his book, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*.

Viewed strictly as a biography, Schor's work is scholarly, evenly paced in its writing, and reasonably comprehensive in its use of available documents. Schor's exhaustive newspaper research and extensive work in most manuscript collections containing Garnet documents has provided excellent documentation for his biography. Only a few collections and newspapers in New York, Ohio, and England have escaped Schor's personal research. However, considering the fact that black abolitionists' documents are scattered literally throughout the world, Schor's research is reasonable and adequate.

However, the real importance of this work lies beyond the normal boundaries of the biography. The significance is his fresh analysis of the interaction of Garnet and various other black leaders of the nineteenth century and how they attempted to devise methods to bring black people, both slave and freemen, into the mainstream of American life. Schor deftly illustrates

his point that too many historians view black abolitionists as a "homogenous group of contributors to the single goal or as intellectuals divided into optimistic intergrationists at one extreme and the pessimists who favored emigration and a black nationalism on the other." So simple a categorization ignores the complexities of attitudes and ideas held by so many different people in different places at different times. The richly varied responses of black abolitionists throughout the campaign clearly deserves more careful and accurate evaluation.

Garnet, himself, is a classic example of a man who changed his strategy and tactics in the fight against slavery. Schor illustrates, clearly and with concise insight, how Garnet reacted to nineteenth century historical events in the antislavery movement. Garnet, for example, was an ardent anticolonizationist in his early life, maintaining that with time and perseverance, black people would be treated as equals. But later events indicated that blacks were actually losing the battle in their search for freedom in the United States. Rather than clinging stubbornly to his early ideas, Garnet became a supporter of colonization plans so that his black brethren would find their true freedom. Also, Garnet changed politically from a moderate to a radical as laws and court decisions became increasingly discriminatory toward blacks in the 1840's and 1850's. Therefore, when measured against his peers, Garnet appears to be more a mentor than a follower in the fight against slavery, prejudice, and discrimination.

Finally, Schor's book is valuable to those interested in nineteenth century social history. For those students of the antislavery movement in the United States in general and black abolitionists in particular, this book is essential reading.

Michael J. Stanke - Black Abolitionist Papers Project
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
